

Opinion

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Vote yes

Abolish unfair city charter rule

NO ONE should be penalized for seeking a city council seat.

But that's exactly what could happen under Farmington Hills' city charter. Three years ago, voters said no to a charter amendment that would have let members of city boards and commissions become council candidates without first having to resign.

On Aug. 2, voters will reconsider the amendment. Just as we did in 1985, we urge voters to say yes.

When he announced his council candidacy in 1985, Jonathan Grant stepped down from the library board. After he narrowly lost his bid for a council seat, Grant was reapointed to the library board on then-mayor Jan Dolan's recommendation.

At the library board's request, Dolan didn't fill the vacancy until after the council election. The board underwent a lot of changes and turmoil over the previous year and felt it was in its best interest to have Jon Grant, the vice chairman, back if he lost. He represented the kind of leadership they didn't want to lose. Rightly or wrongly, I made my decision on that basis," Dolan said.

If Dolan hadn't held off, Grant would have been a double loser — and only because he wanted to serve on the city's highest policy-making panel.

LAST YEAR, council candidates Aldo Vagnozzi and Jean Fox had to resign from the library board and zoning board, respectively. On then-mayor Ben Marks' recommendation, the council named Mary Kay Zolton to Vagnozzi's former library board seat. If Vagnozzi had failed in his council bid, he would have been a double loser.

In recommending Zolton, Marks — who favors the proposed amendment — said he was simply obeying the charter, filling vacancies as qualified applicants came forth.

"That charter is our law," Marks said. "It is unfair to ask anybody who sits in this chair to give any special consideration to anybody who's running for council — for whatever reason."

Why should hard-working board or commission members have to resign just because they care enough about the city's welfare to seek a seat on the city council?

"I don't think that's fair. I really don't."

Neither do we.

That's why the council had little choice last fall but to fill Vagnozzi's former seat when Zolton, a well-qualified applicant, emerged.

Only in the past two years has the mayor heard from enough applicants to develop a backlog. It hasn't always been easy finding qualified folks to serve on the city's 20 boards and commissions, despite a pool of 68,000 residents.

AS WE see it, the "must resign first" rule imposes an unfair penalty. Why should hard-working board or commission members have to resign just because they care enough about the city's welfare to seek a seat on the city council?

We suspect the provision was included to prevent candidates from playing politics or having an unfair advantage. But with basically two months between the filing deadline and election day, it's unlikely any candidate would have enough time to parlay an appointed post into an elected seat.

The provision may not, as Vagnozzi believes, send a "chilling message" to board and commission members interested in council service. But it does prompt second thoughts among worthy candidates for the city council, Farmington Hills' most powerful and only elected board.

There's also the matter of consistency. City council members resign county or state office aren't required to resign first. Mayor Jody Soronen is running for the county commission. Councilwoman Dolan is seeking a state House seat.

Amend the city charter Aug. 2. Vote yes.

Prosecutor

McDonald: best of GOP field

THERE ARE flashier candidates. There are more rousing orators. But no one in the courthouse has won more respect than John J. McDonald, the best choice in the Republican primary for Oakland County prosecutor.

McDonald, 48, a county commissioner from Farmington Hills, also brings the four-man campaign the best grasp of the office's progress and problems. He is thoroughly prepared to take over from retiring Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson.

McDonald learned the prosecutor's trade from the inside during his three years there as an assistant until 1972. He developed a grasp of its staffing, morale and public relations soft spots from the outside during his 14 years on the county board, including 10 as chairman of the personnel committee.

To commissioners, who control the purse strings, McDonald is more than just "good ol' Jack," a familiar face. He is genuinely admired, respected, trusted and listened to.

Already McDonald has given some thought to the kind of chief assistant he would bring in — someone with prosecutorial experience, with other legal and administrative experience; not necessarily even a campaign supporter.

McDonald has been a burglary victim. Although he's soft-spoken, there's no need to fear he will be soft on crime.

A former teacher who is married to a teacher, McDonald talks about youth crime somewhat differently from the other candidates — leading one to think he has the best sense of when to throw the book at a young monster and when to ease up.

THE CHIEF ISSUE in this campaign has not been crime but the personality of Dick Thompson, Patterson's chief assistant, right-hand man and veritable clone.

With Patterson's endorsement, Thompson would figure to be a shoe-in. Just the opposite has happened. Although there is no hint of scandal, Thompson's candidacy seems to have attracted opposition. The opponents all tell various versions of the same story about the high turnover rate among assistant prosecutors.

Is it because he has been around so long and had a hatchet-man job to do that Thompson has made enemies? Well, McDonald has had many chances to accumulate enemies in his long county board tenure, and instead he has only warm admirers.

The Patterson-Thompson regime has not been a bad one. But a wide body of opinion holds it was too zealous in charging cops for the bad effects of auto pursuits and a propensity to over-charge defendants. Certainly there has been grandstand-



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ing. And sometimes one wonders if the verbal attacks on judges weren't counter-productive. Thompson says that if he's elected, his administration will be a continuation of Patterson's. We take him at his word.

IT HAS BEEN an exciting race among four intelligent candidates.

Jeffrey Leib, the former West Bloomfield Township trustee and civic activist, has many of the same traits as McDonald and has collected many potent endorsements, but can't match McDonald's grasp of county government.

State Sen. Richard Fessler of Union Lake has been the most productive source of ideas in the campaign, just as he is a productive source of legislation in Lansing. But he fell short of setting a public example during his own period of troubles, and his attitude toward mandatory seat belts and outlawing "fuzzbusters" lends weight to the notion he's a defense lawyer. That's not bad, but it's not what Oakland County needs in a prosecutor.

For people concerned about protection from crime, it's a good field, and Jack McDonald is the best of the Republican entrants.

HICKINS



Battle of the suburbs paints a bleak future

JUST FOR A second, take a look around your neighborhood, your subdivision, your suburban community. Then, look beyond.

The Detroit suburbs today are like an economic amoeba, vacillating from region to region, seeking new life. And like an amoeba, it finally splits apart, leaving behind a part to fend for itself and finally die.

A fascinating new book, "Detroit: Race and Uneven Development," outlines a scenario that could very well threaten your community.

Researched and written by a team of Michigan State University professors, it reads like a Robert Ludlum thriller.

Except, instead of taking place in some exotic, far off locale, it's your hometown and many familiar local names are main characters.

"NEW URBAN development continues to be targeted to the privileged few. Power over urban development continues to be concentrated among a handful of individuals and corporations whose reach spans the metropolises and beyond," say the authors.

And it's the "beyond" about which you need to be concerned. Because beneath all the affluence you see is the underpinning that keeps the economic amoeba on the move and that spells decay for your city.

Originally, the authors say, two Detroiters existed — the actual city proper and its adjoining suburbs.

As residents of the metropolitan area, we must unite to stop developers from using us up and spitting us out like so many olive pits.

But with the shift of the auto companies' economic fortunes, the competition for growth has changed from city vs. suburb to suburb vs. suburb.

Now the amoeba seeks new life. Older suburbs raised on the economic might of the industrialized auto industry are being abandoned for new communities, built on the technology of the computer age.

WAYNE COUNTY suburbs have been supplanted by Oakland County communities. And now the southern Oakland County communities are being economically abandoned by ones to the north.

To some, the dividing line has been drawn at the yet-to-be completed I-696 expressway. Property north of the line is more valuable than that south of the line.

Yet others have drawn the line even farther north. While Southfield struggles to remain vibrant, cracks are already showing in Troy and



Steve Barnaby

Farmington Hills.

Business is looking north to Rochester Hills and beyond. Oakland Township, with its strict zoning codes, is projected by some to replace Bloomfield Hills as the home for the rich and famous of metro Detroit.

And as the Oakland County Tech Park grows in influence, obscure communities like Lake Orion, Oxford and Clarkston will replace the likes of Birmingham, West Bloomfield and Farmington Hills as preferred places to live.

Meanwhile places like Redford, Garden City, Westland and even the seemingly new Canton struggle to hang on to past glories.

"These cities," say the authors about our suburbs, "remain deeply divided along lines of race, class and municipal boundary."

As residents of the metropolitan area, we must unite to stop developers from using us up and spitting us out like so many olive pits.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Staff effort is excellent

To the editor:

Just a note of thanks to your reporter, Louise Okrutsky, and photographer, Randy Bors, who were very professional and did an excellent job on the article about my business.

I have had many favorable comments.

Thank you again for the nice job.

Marvin Yagoda,

Farmington Hills

We're facing ethical crisis

To the editor:

Have you ever asked, "How many more scandals must there be before Congress acts to curtail these abuses?"

In this case, I am referring to the crisis our nation is facing in the ethical standards and behavior of our public officials, as for instance, the convictions of ex-presidential assistants Michael Deaver and Lyn Nofziger and the ongoing questions about the conduct of Attorney General Ed Meese.

And now the investigation into what may be massive Pentagon

fraud and bribery in the department of defense.

THESE ARE only the tip of the iceberg — a recent committee report lists 242 Reagan administration officials who have faced serious ethics questions.

One of the chief causes of this ethics question is the growth and spread of the so-called "revolving door" abuses when public officials leave top positions in the government only to return immediately as lobbyists to peddle their influence for private interests.

This spring, the Senate passed bill SB337, which tightens restrictions on lobbying by former government officials and included provisions covering members of Congress and top congressional staff.

In this action, the Senate acknowledged the need to strengthen current post-government employment laws.

NOW IT is up to action by the House of Representatives. The Judiciary committee is currently considering "revolving door" legislation, and a bill could come to a vote in the full house before August.

A strong bill should include a clear, enforceable one-year "cooling off" period during which former high-ranking executive branch officials would be barred from lobbying the executive branch.

It should also bar members of Congress from lobbying their former colleagues in Congress for one year after leaving government.

The public's faith in our government needs to be restored.

Few things are more discouraging and demoralizing to honorable public servants and to the American people than the spectacle of public officials cashing in on their positions of public trust.

Please consider writing your congressman about this very important legislation.

Viola L. Pedersen,
Plymouth

Hills taxes are in line

To the editor:

Please compliment and thank Mayor Jody Soronen and her council, also city manager Bill Costick and his staff, for the improved services provided us and for holding down the budget.

We old-timers turned over to you a very good community. Now we want to help you improve it.

I paid my summer taxes in full. We are pleased to pay them because we are receiving full value for our money.

Those candidates who preach "I will greatly lower your taxes while greatly increasing your services" are only saying what people want to hear them say. They have not done their homework.

John Murphy,
Farmington Hills

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